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ABSTRACT

Case studies of two colleges of very different financial status are contrasted to illustrate principles of leadership during both good economic times and difficult times. Visits and interviews at four prospering colleges and four colleges under financial stress were conducted to determine the financial state of each college and the role of leadership in its subjective construction. The goal was to discover what Erickson (1986) refers to as "concrete universals," arrived at by studying a specific case in great detail and then comparing it with other cases studied in equally great detail; and these universals were embodied in the two pseudonymous institutions, Arcadia College (financially sound) and Industrial College (in financial decline) that are the subjects of this paper. The first person account of visits to the two colleges are organized around the following leadership aspects: complexity in role--delimiting considerations; self (the college president) in role; defining and attending to financial stress; communicating about finances; thinking about stability and growth; and speculating about the future. The observations and emerging propositions of this paper are organized in terms of: the creation of financial realities; the creation of financial stress; the reduction of financial stress; the merging of complexity and commitment; and communication and learning. Among conclusions are that the faculty may feel financial stress regardless of a college's objective financial state, and that leaders may moderate this stress by crafting their communication, including their non-verbal communicative acts, with care. The study also notes that a college's financial resources are part of the college's culture. Includes 42 references. (DB)

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On the Making of "Good Times" and "Hard Times": The Social Construction of Resource Stress

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On the Making of "Good Times" and "Hard Times": The Social Construction of Resource Stress

Financial troubles always seem to be with us, appearing and reappearing in different forms (e.g., declining revenues, soaring costs) and in different places, even among the wealthiest of institutions (Chira 1990, Magner 1989), and persisting over various lengths of time (e.g., short-term resource drops or long-term decline). Recent statistics show that over the next five years, the typical college president is more likely to feel challenged by finances than by virtually any other issue, including curriculum, diversity, and quality (ACE 1990). While recent analyses of higher education finance relative to larger economic and demographic changes confirm the likelihood of financial pressures ahead (Grassmuck 1990, Wilson 1990) and colleges' needs to prepare for them (Daniels 1989, NCPGF 1989), many college administrators would testify that financial trouble is here already (Dodge 1990, Weiss 1989).

Given how prominent resources can be, and given leaders' enduring concerns about them, it is not surprising that higher education research has traditionally devoted substantial attention to what leaders can or should do to prevent, identify, or resolve money problems (see Zammuto 1987 and Leslie 1987 for comprehensive reviews). Simply put, the higher education literature often frames resource loss as detrimental and dispiriting, resource gain as beneficial and heartening, and leadership as stopping the one and assuring the other. What this view assumes is that leaders who are effective can fix or otherwise improve resource flows, and that those who are not effective can not do this.

Everything else being equal, the leader who generates resources may, in fact, be viewed as more effective than the one who does not. But everything else is rarely equal, and it may be that, in an era of decline, there is little that a college president can do to stave off financial distress. If this is true, it may be inappropriate to define leadership without considering larger contextual constraints related to decline (Whetten 1980). I began this study with just this concern: What does good leadership mean in an era of decline, given that the conditions associated with decline are often impervious to leaders' attempts to improve them? In particular, how does leadership during the "hard times" of decline differ from leadership during "good times"?

To address these questions, I present two colleges with very different financial statuses -- Arcadia College which is financially stable and strong with a growing resource base, and Industrial College,[1] caught in economic decline and facing steep

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[1] In order to abide by promises of research confidentiality, I have disguised numerous features of institutional and personal identity. Arcadia College and

and continuous hardship.[2] While the colleges differ by Carnegie type and control (one is private, the other public), both are small (under 6000 FTE), and both focus strongly on undergraduate teaching. While their presidents are dissimilar in their tenure (one is very experienced, the other is new), they are remarkably alike in their leadership orientation in that both have persistently contributed, and in similar ways, to a slowly emerging image of effective leadership in the context of the Institutional Leadership Project (ILP).

For example, previous studies of the ILP show these two presidents to be highly complex in their organizational leadership, spanning multiple cognitive perspectives (Bensimon 1989b, 1990b) and targets of attention (Neumann and Bensimon 1990), and exhibiting prominent interpretive strategy (Neumann 1989b), symbolic competence (Bensimon 1989b), and a well-defined learning orientation (Neumann 1990b). Both presidents also construct cognitively complex teams which they orchestrate in complex ways (Neumann, in press) and toward complex ends (Bensimon 1989a). Thus, as with most field-based "natural experiments" (Erickson 1986), these two settings, viewed in their totality, are not as alike as we might want them to be (or as they would be in a more controlled and classical laboratory context), but they are similar on the essential features of the study, in this case, the presidents' leadership orientations.

I found that to address my original questions about the meaning of good leadership during the "hard times" of decline that I had to probe deeply into what "resource realities" are,

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Industrial College are pseudonyms, and although I refer to them as "colleges," I use the word in the most generic sense and without reference to a particular Carnegie (institutional) type. The gender that I ascribe to individuals does not necessarily reflect a person's true gender. All position titles (e.g., president, head of faculty senate, etc.), names of official groups (e.g., cabinet), and other identifying features of institutional life are given generically. I present institutional statistics (e.g., enrollment) in terms of rough categories rather than specific numbers.

[2] I initially examined patterns of change in FTE enrollment and total raw revenues for the time period 1985-6 through 1988-9 for each of eight institutions participating in this study. In the case of Industrial College, the rate of inflation-adjusted revenue increases fell well below the average growth rate of all American colleges and universities. Within the study sample, Industrial ranked among the lowest three of the eight institutions. Arcadia's rate of inflation-adjusted change was well above the national average, and the college ranked among the top three colleges in the sample. Comparisons were based on the "Higher Education Prices and Price Indexes" (Research Associates of Washington, 1988).

and especially into how leaders and others construct what they are in their own minds and in each others' minds. In the cases that follow I give only brief attention to a standard, objective profile of the financial condition. My purpose, instead, is to flesh out people's understandings and feelings about the financial state of the college and to examine the role of leadership in its subjective construction. In short, I consider the financial realities of these two colleges as social constructions (Berger and Luckmann 1967) and as personal interpretations (Bruner 1987, Rabinow and Sullivan 1979, Schutz 1967) that are often shared (Smircich and Morgan 1982). To foreshadow the conclusions, I found that the financial realities that we see "out there" exist, often with more life and more force, "in here" -- in our thinking and in our feeling about what we see and believe. Effective leadership during "hard times" and also during "good times" hinges on this realization -- that financial reality is simultaneously an object to be fixed and a subject to be created and shaped.

Method

During 1988-89 I visited eight institutions purposively selected for this study, on the basis of visits conducted during 1986-7, from a larger sample of thirty-two colleges and universities participating in the Institutional Leadership Project[3]: Four of the colleges reflected high levels of financial stress in 1986-7 while the other four showed little or no such stress. Each sub-group of four consisted of two public and two private colleges; all eight emphasized undergraduate teaching as their primary mission. During three-day visits to each campus I conducted individual interviews with the president, the chair of the board of trustees, four members of the president's administrative cabinet, and between four and six faculty members, including the head of the faculty senate, two department chairs, and other faculty leaders or knowledgeable faculty observers. My intent was to elicit their understandings and feelings about their institution's resource condition and their leadership, as well as their own place in the college, and to trace how these had changed since the previous visit in 1986-7.

My approach in the analysis has been to proceed case by case, looking in great detail at how campus members perceive and experience selected aspects of campus life and leadership (e.g., Neumann 1989a; Neumann, in press), and also at the larger, interlocked patterns of interpretation crossing whole contexts

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[3] A complete description of the purpose and design of the Institutional Leadership Project is contained in Birnbaum, Bensimon, and Neumann, 1989.

(e.g., Neumann 1990a, this paper). I used what I learned about any one institution, viewed in its particulars, to understand another. The process is comparative (Yin 1984), emphasizes "textualization" of experience (Van Maanen 1988), and resembles what Erickson (1986) refers to as a search for "concrete universals arrived at by studying a specific case in great detail and then comparing it with other cases studied in equally great detail," as opposed to searching, in a positivist vein, for "abstract universals arrived at by statistical generalization from a sample to a population" (p. 130). Erickson explains further that the task of interpretive research is to:

> ... uncover the different layers of universality and particularity that are confronted in the specific case at hand -- what is broadly universal, what generalizes to other similar situations, what is unique to the given instance. This can only be done, ... by attending to the details of the concrete case at hand. Thus the primary concern of interpretive research is particularizability, rather than generalizability. (p.130)

Moreover, interpretive research takes account not only of the sense-making activities of institutional participants but of the researcher's own values and preconceptions as well (Neugarten 1985, Tierney 1988). Given the norms of interpretive research, I describe Arcadia College and Industrial College in great detail and in my own voice, bringing out the patterns of meaning that I saw and heard first hand, and that, in retrospect, I continue to find. My first-person voice is a reminder to the reader that what follows is my interpretation of college members' interpretations of the campus worlds that they have jointly constructed.

Financially Sound and Solid: Arcadia College

As I enter the center of campus I see students rushing from building to building in a soft rain. Even on a gray morning, Arcadia College looks dignified, groomed, cared for. My first impressions bear out as I talk to faculty and administrators throughout the day. These people radiate dignity, humble confidence, and security in their collective identity, and dedication to caring for even the smallest details of their life together.

While Arcadia is not among the wealthiest colleges of its type in the country or in the study's national sample, it ranks among the most financially healthy, always balancing its budget and increasing its total resource flows at levels markedly above those of all American colleges and universities. While total

resources increase yearly, the enrollment of Arcadia remains relatively steady, although occasional dips cause momentary anguish -- among faculty more than among administrators. The types of students who enroll at Arcadia are as predictable as the number. Joshua Anderson, Arcadia's president, defines the college's approach to student recruitment as focused on "who?" as opposed to "how many?": "We are not looking for numbers but for the right applicants."

Presidential Leadership and College Resources

I found that campus interviewees were clear and consistent in their image of Joshua Anderson, and that with some recent exceptions, Anderson's view of his own leadership coincided closely with theirs. My purpose in this section is to sketch what I heard of that image.

Complexity in Role: Expanding the Breadth of Presidential Attention. Anderson is as firm in attending to some things as to their opposites, even if, at times, this is uncomfortable for him. For example, while he prefers to look after the "day to day" details and routines of campus life, he "forces" himself to attend only to those that he sees as having "a major impact on the institution," and he restrains himself from those that don't. Senior faculty leaders understand and appreciate his approach: "[Joshua] is interested in the nooks and crannies of the campus ... [but] he does not get lost in minutiae." But in addition to attending to meaningful details, Anderson "forces" himself to focus on "high impact initiatives ... big issues" although these are less appealing to him.

Anderson is particularly self-conscious about his natural tendency to be "an inside president" -- doing "a good job in communicating what we have done internally" to the faculty and staff -- but not giving enough attention "to translating [this] beyond the bounds of the campus ... so people [outside the college] really understand." He explains that while his low-key definitions and explanations work well within the college, outsiders require a different, and for him, more difficult approach:

> It is beating the drum -- I am not naturally inclined to this kind of thing. I tend more to soft sell. I don't really put pressure on people to give. I try to demonstrate that we do something worth supporting .... We need to be a little more aggressive and hard hitting.

Despite his clear preference for an inside presidency, Anderson adjusts his attention outwardly because he believes it necessary, but even there, he continues to act within the confines of his established leadership style.

Anderson's "forced" stretching and balancing of perspectives is not always so discomforting, and he handles many such tasks with ease and grace while interested campus members watch,

usually approving. The trustees, for example, appreciate how carefully he attends to Arcadia's "economy and culture." And the faculty praise his attention to "people rather than buildings or pizzazz" while simultaneously applauding his "excellent management of the budget and its priorities." Even Anderson sees "the economy and culture" dynamic at play in his mind. On the one hand, he describes his "natural inclination toward finances" and says that he can "tell you any major figure on the institution's books," and at the same time he insists, "I don't see what I am doing with the administrators as the core -- but rather what we are doing with the faculty."

Anderson presents himself as equally effective in balancing consultation and directiveness. Faculty members report that he "seeks input" and "has a good ear," but that he knows when to "make decisions" and that he is "careful as to communicating [the] reasons" for them.

Commitments in Role: Delimiting Considerations. While Joshua Anderson is known for his diverse and flexible perspective, he is known just as well for his firm -- even unbending -- adherence to several commitments and beliefs.

First, Joshua Anderson defines himself and others view him as financially cautious and conserving -- as running "a pretty tight ship .... not risk-taking .... not spending money that we don't have." Faculty members say that he often reminds them that "our basic limitation is money," and he says that he will not commit the college to "doing more than resources would allow us to do well" and that "not balancing our budget is not an option."

Second, President Anderson is unequivocal about his need to remain engaged in campus life. Although he knows that some people criticize him for being "too concerned about what is happening day to day" and not concerned enough about "the external presidency ... [and] fundraising," he asserts, "I cannot be an absentee president or a figurehead." He sees these external tasks as extensions of rather than as substitutes for his core internal role:

> I don't do well when I am not hands on. I have to have the pulse of the place -- my fingers in the campus pie. I don't feel good off-campus talking if I am not speaking from concrete experience. If I can't talk about students and the curriculum, I can't be effective .... It is an inherent conflict.

Third, he expresses more concern about how resources are used -- and about how people make sense of how resources are expended -- than about how they are acquired in the first place: "I am sensitive to priorities and how we use our resources."

Fourth, he believes that in faculty members' minds financial value is often equated with assumptions about personal value, but that in reality these two forms of value can rarely align. He believes that leaders are responsible for managing this discrepancy, and that they can do so by demonstrating competent institutional management and good-faith efforts to compensate or otherwise reward faculty fairly:

> Our faculty always live with the tension of not having the income that they need and what they are worth .... [But] the faculty believe that we are doing the best that we can by them. Our resources are managed well. We are open about what we are doing. We understand the priorities. They can live with that.

Finally, while Anderson devotes substantial time and energy to financial and administrative matters, he looks at them through an educational lens:

> I [have] fixed in my own frame of reference the commitment that what happens in the daily life of students is the most important consideration in what decisions we make. If we lose sight of that we lose the purpose of our being.

An example of how Anderson uses this educational lens to address financial concerns is captured in a well-known campus story: When he first came to Arcadia, Joshua Anderson found "years of red ink," an inadequate operating budget that "we were not managing well," and several expensive academic programs that were not working. Rather than dealing with the financial problem in financial terms (for example, by economizing, fundraising, or marketing), he tackled it from the perspective of academic quality -- pushing for cuts in ineffective programs, rethinking the curriculum and instructional format, hiring a cadre of new faculty, and instituting "a rigorous system" of faculty and instructional evaluation.

Looking back, Anderson rationalizes these and related actions as "building quality" first, and then "pushing our price up" as people came to appreciate and value the product that resulted:

> I think that people are always attracted to quality. Our building of quality experiences for students -- that is the foundation of what we do. If we don't have that base, we won't get students or donors. Ours is not a big bang approach to fundraising but building solidly and developing confidence over the long haul.

Anderson believes that educational quality is a necessary precedent to (rather than an outcome of) financial development, and that it is this strategy that "put the institution on its financial feet." A top-level administrator offers this interpretation:

> It is hard to separate how [the president] has influenced the financial condition from how he has influenced the reputation and the total program .... His question is: How do you put together a college that puts out a good product?

The faculty, especially senior leaders, credit the president for what they see as the resulting success:

> Joshua Anderson came here and led a revolution -- to a new era of growth and ... leadership that respects faculty involvement .... He put a lot of money into people and [instructional] hardware [and in so doing,

he] left a legacy of this.

This was the presidential image that I put together: The members of Arcadia College know Anderson as a person of diverse and complex abilities but clear commitments. While this image remained constant over the two research visits, by 1988-9 there were shadows of change.

Self in Role. During my visit in 1988-9 Anderson speaks at length about the importance of internal presidential leadership and educational priorities just as he did during 1986-7, but he adds something new: Over the past two years he has been using his time differently, immersing himself in major fundraising drives that have, in his words, "taken a lot of my psychological energy." A close administrative colleague explains:

> The President is [now] very committed to expanding the financial base of the college, and he is giving nearly all his time to that. In his early years he tried to be an inside president. He still knows the people here but is not as involved in the day to day. He has a greater appreciation for fundraising.

While campus members approve of the president's search for new resources, several are concerned that he does not "know much about ... tapping resources" and that now "he can't be as much of an in-house president any more." One person describes a change in the campus mood -- that there is "discomfort internally" and "comments [like] 'Joshua is gone again. We have to wait 'til he gets back.'" And another adds, "[Joshua] is less visible on campus and that may have created problems .... Maybe he is more disassociated."

As I speak to Anderson during this second visit, I hear an unfamiliar refrain -- that the college "needs more resources" and that it needs a president who can raise them. But I also hear a different kind of need -- one that is more personal:

> I would like to take time ... to step back and re-evaluate .... maybe [Arcadia] needs someone other than Joshua Anderson, or maybe Joshua Anderson needs a different role.

When I ask Anderson to tell me about the kind of leadership that Arcadia needs now, he refers to both the college's needs and his own:

> We need leadership that can generate resources .... we have millions of dollars in needs .... If someone can do better than me then the institution needs to own up to this. My wife and I are asking at what point we need to back off. I can see myself phasing out ....

Resources and Stress

Defining and Attending to Financial Stress. President Anderson describes the college's financial condition as positive but modest, explaining that resources have "not really changed

... if anything, they have strengthened ... we are strengthened materially." The vice presidents give "mixed" reviews. Although they see the college as "more stable than ever before," with continuously "balanced budgets" and "better facilities than we have ever had," they worry about the continued availability of revenues, believing that the college could face "a real tough situation." All administrators say that the cabinet faces "painful" decisions each year as they struggle with limits:

> We are looking from one year to the next with a small margin. There are hard choices each year about what is important .... programs are always fighting for a minimal increase.

Most faculty leaders present two simultaneously different views of Arcadia's financial condition: They echo administrators' positive assessments ("no deficit," "no red"), but they also see an Arcadia that is "right on the edge." One faculty member talks about the healthy "steady state" that has resulted from years of careful management, but she also refers to a "precarious balance ... feeling like the college is always one year away from disappearing." She adds, "We always seem to be balancing ... if we do this, what are we not going to do?" Another faculty member describes Arcadia as "running very hard to keep enrollment steady ... shuddering with each annual tuition increase -- will students continue to come here?" Others point to a variety of trouble spots -- "staffing restrictions ... library holdings [that] have not expanded well ... [and needs for] more financial aid." When I ask a senior faculty member how these perceptions affect the faculty he explains:

> We are a community that thrives and anguishes together -- we have a sense of emotional pain that faculty feel when things don't go well. We feel it if the college hurts and not just down in our pocketbooks. ... We have had both good and bad [financial] news .... decreases and increases. The faculty follow this.

Although my analysis of Arcadia's finances according to rough but standard measures yielded a very positive picture (especially relative to other colleges and universities nationally), most faculty interviewees portrayed the college as financially stressed. Their stress was particularly prominent at four points: in descriptions of how people communicate about finances, in views of growth and stability, in comparisons of Arcadia to a desired peer group, and in speculations about the future.

Communicating about finances. When I ask faculty interviewees how they learn about the college's financial condition, I learn that most rely on "the grapevine," "word of mouth," and "gossip in the lunchroom." Some faculty also refer to meetings where the president "tells us about the state of financial affairs" including "the number of students, ... the budget pie and how it is expended, future plans, shifts in

distribution." But they also say that the president rarely has the last word on how faculty understand the budget because just as he finishes these presentations, "the grapevine" takes over "giving finesse" to his "statistics." As one faculty member explains, "His statistics ... what they mean ... how we are doing ... that gets fleshed out informally."

Administrators say that few faculty "have a complete [financial] picture or could have one" even though administrators "work at it all the time." One administrator elaborates:

> If there is a slight decrease ..., people get scared. We have to be careful how we explain downturns .... The faculty panic early .... We need to interpret it to the faculty carefully .... You have to help them see the possibilities and not just the costs. So much of it is how you say things in faculty meetings.

Another adds that although Arcadia's financial status continues to change "for the better," that "this is not widely understood" by faculty, and that there is a need now for administrators:

> ... to meet with faculty. They don't have the context. We need to lay out for them past years of enrollment and [what] we have brought in ... [that] we have increased quality and raised more money. Because the needs are so great, people have no context and don't understand. It is a communication problem.

Thinking about stability and growth. In 1986-7 President Anderson says that Arcadia needs "qualitative" growth -- "challenging what we do and how we do it .... exploring new ways of achieving" -- and that it should avoid the "major changes in mission" that physical growth can bring, even if this requires academic departments "restraining themselves." A close administrative colleague explains Anderson's and the cabinet's position:

> We are an institution with about [2000] students. The facilities are geared that way, as are the faculty and the staff .... The question is: Will we continue to be an institution of [2000], or will we become larger? That would be a major change .... would require a different institutional thrust .... We will have to hang on to where we are at. We can have no major new thrust.

By 1988-9 a small but voluble proportion of the faculty -- several of them young and recently hired -- had started to question this strategy and senior faculty members' trusting acceptance of it:

> There is both an old and a young Arcadia faculty .... [facing] a philosophical and generational struggle. The older faculty are content to ... let administrators administer. The younger faculty ... are more snoopy and questioning.

One of the younger faculty members describes the emerging point of view:

> We need aggressive leadership in program and

> fundraising initiatives. You can't have a standard program. You have to go out to the community. It will make the college grow. If you have a laid back leadership, the college won't grow. It will be death .... You can't hold back.

Comparing the college to its peers. In assessing their financial well-being, Arcadia's administrators usually compare themselves to three peer groups on a variety of performance indicators such as enrollment, faculty salaries, academic program offerings, and revenues. Depending on the peer colleges with which they compare themselves and the indicator that they select as the basis of their comparison, Arcadia can look moderately priced or expensive, financially solid or under-supported. In the words of a key administrator, Arcadia's financial position "varies depending on what you look at and what measure you use."

While administrators view Arcadia's financial condition from several different vantage points, faculty usually rely on just one comparison group and on fewer performance indicators. For example, a cabinet-level administrator defines Arcadia's financial status relative to three sets of peers -- a small cluster of its "biggest competitors," a larger group of similar colleges "in this part of the country," and the total population of similar colleges in the U.S., and he focuses equally on "revenue production" and "quality reputation" as markers of successful performance. In contrast, a key faculty leader compares Arcadia only to the "biggest competitor" group and then only in relation to revenues.

The resulting differences are not surprising. The administrators who look broadly see a broad range of outcomes, and they are able to consider how strengths may balance weaknesses:

> From a marketing perspective ... it is risky .... But we have a more stable enrollment .... [and] we are well established in our position.

The faculty who typically take a narrower view see a narrower band of outcomes -- for example, that Arcadia is "on the low end" relative to its peers and "in continual risk of pricing [itself] out of the market."

Speculating about the future. At Arcadia people typically see the present as improved financially over the past, but they usually project a more difficult financial future. Thus administrators might refer to "an increase in our yield on applications" over past years, but at the same time they will caution, "We all understand what the next five years will be like ... recruitment will be tougher." Even when the present day brings a real financial crunch, college members give less attention to how it is affecting the college in its immediacy than to how it might escalate or re-emerge in the future. A faculty member describes how a recent dip in revenues caused a scare that was grounded less in what it was in the present than in people's speculations about what it might become in the future:

> We have had a lean year ... [because of the] shortfall. The faculty would not notice much of a difference [this year]. There were no program cuts, no staff cuts .... Next year it may be the same. This could be serious if it became a pattern.

Financially Strapped: Industrial College

Industrial College, located in downtown Thomasville, feels a world away the mainstream urban center I have just left. Thomasville has a tattered, hard-work look about it. Unemployment is high, and residents say that they live in one of the poorest regions of the country. Although I am sure that the damp, cold weather colors my perceptions, I am struck, during both visits, by the run-down neighborhoods I pass -- aging paint, loose shutters, homes in disrepair.

In contrast to Arcadia, Industrial College reflects one of the weakest financial records in the research sample. Its resources increase yearly at levels substantially lower than the average for all American colleges and universities. Over recent years, it has experienced several major resource reductions, and the possibility of more losses hangs in the air.

When I first visited Industrial College in 1986-7 I saw it as a financially troubled institution set in an equally troubled region. However, in revisiting two years later, I have the sense that life -- or the feeling of life -- in the college differs now from how life must feel in the outside community. A receptionist greets me cheerfully as I enter the main building, ready to provide college information or directions. I glance at what I remember as a blank gray wall now boasting a colorful bulletin board covered with newspaper cutouts -- pictures and stories about faculty, students, administrators, individual and group accomplishments, collegiate events. People walk briskly down hallways and around me, talking to each other about students, reminding each other of tasks, rehashing recent meetings. There is the hum of a busy morning in the air. My feeling, gut-level, is that Industrial College is more orderly, more purposeful, more active -- perhaps more alive -- than I found it before.

Presidential Leadership and College Resources

Rebecca Keeton, the president of Industrial College, strikes a sharp, consistent image in people's minds. What follows is an account of that picture as faculty members and administrators, including the president, presented it to me.

Complexity in Role: Expanding the Breadth of Presidential Attention. When Rebecca Keeton thinks of Industrial College, its strengths and vulnerabilities, she considers its faculty, staff, and students ("The institution [is] only as good as [its]

people"). She also considers the quality of their work ("excellent teaching") and their dedication in accomplishing it ("We have some of the finest, most dedicated, student-oriented faculty that I have ever worked with"). However, like Joshua Anderson at Arcadia, Keeton also thinks of the college in more inanimate terms -- as a structure of "resources," explaining that as president she has to "see the overall picture ... the sources of funds and where the expenses go."

Given these two divergent understandings of college life -- the human and the technical -- Rebecca Keeton, like Joshua Anderson, simultaneously practices two very different brands of leadership. From the human perspective, she is "a cheerleader ... a coach ... a mentor ... providing encouragement and support." From the more technical and economic perspective, she tracks "external funding ... putting [money] where we most need it." The faculty see this dualism in her -- that she is a "humanist" and "interested in people in the raw," but that she is also "an astute money manager."

Keeton's complex outlook shows itself in other ways, for example, in her pursuit of opportunities for change and especially in fundraising. She is known for her ability to "form alliances" with resource providers, "making them aware of what the college can provide" and winning their support. But at the same time, she insists on preserving what the college <u>already</u> is, and especially what it is already doing in the name of educational quality. In her fundraising drives, she is far more likely to concentrate on clarifying to outsiders what educational quality means at Industrial College, how the educational program works, and why it is deserving of support, rather than promising to adapt it to their differing expectations. In the words of faculty members, Keeton "works for the college" by "molding and affecting [the] opinions" of whose who would support what it stands for.

I hear other examples of Keeton's complex outlook, several of which are reminiscent of Arcadia's president. For example, she is careful to "take her time ... [to] give attention to the details" that are meaningful to campus life, but at the same time, she is assiduous in keeping "the big picture" before her, including the "economic ... political ... and social trends ... [that may] impact on an institution." She is also careful to blend directiveness with consultation especially when facing difficult decisions, much as Anderson is. An administrator describes her as "standing firm in her convictions ... not wishy-washy," but as someone with whom you can argue and who "can be persuaded." And the faculty say that "she has very definite ideas, but is willing to be cooperative, to modify ...."

<u>Commitments in Role: Delimiting Considerations</u>. Despite her flexible perspective, Keeton presents herself as committed -- even immovable -- on several fronts.

First, unlike Anderson who is always careful to assure that there is money to spend before spending it, Keeton is committed to living with higher degrees of financial risk, especially when

the college's educational priorities are at stake. During the interview, she tells of how the college, virtually "in the hole," purchased some expensive instructional hardware. Even though she knew that "this is ... money that we can't spend," she heeded the advice of academic leaders who urged, "We can't pretend that we are educating with quality if we don't have this." While she knew the expenditure would weaken the college's operating base, she believed that, educationally, the college would "get a much better product":

> If the faculty can teach well, that compensates some for salary problems ... if they have pride in what they are doing, if they are teaching the state of the art.

A top-level administrator explains the president's stance on such decisions as trading financial security for educational accomplishment:

> We would have had more money in the bank if not for the president ... but we would not be accomplishing as much as we are ....

Second, although Keeton realizes how important it is to engage in fundraising, like Anderson, she expresses primary commitment to the internal, educational core of the college. Her earliest actions in office resembled those of Anderson: assessing evaluation criteria, recognizing students who excel beyond expectations and teachers who encourage them, reshaping academic programs in the name of "quality" and "efficiency," and bringing in some new faculty and staff committed to the college's brand of educational quality. In sum, Keeton, like Anderson, started by building quality (locally defined) into the college's educational core, using it as a base for later resource development.

Third, Keeton also resembles Anderson in that she attends equally to resource acquisition and resource use. While asserting that a college president "can't spend enough time out there .... looking for opportunities and building community relations," she personally attends to the internal allocation of hard-won dollars. Her strong involvement in the decision to buy instructional hardware is a case in point.

Fourth, Keeton, like Anderson, is sensitive to how faculty view the value of their efforts, especially as this is reflected in the college's reward system. While Keeton can do little to affect the availability of monetary rewards, she creates substitutes, some coming directly from her:

> Dr. Keeton tells us we are good teachers and we like to hear that ... [she] gives us a lot of stroking .... She loses no opportunity just to say this .... gives us pep talks and makes us feel good, makes us feel we want to live up to the image she has of us.

She also provides rewards in more subtle and round-about but equally powerful ways, for example, by going out of her way to stay in touch with the faculty about their professional work. And she also builds intangible rewards -- in the form of public acknowledgement and appreciation -- into the college's external

community by re-educating the local citizenry about what college faculty are doing to "enhance the quality of life" in the region.

Self in Role. Keeton's leadership image is distinctive in several ways. First, she is known for removing obstacles to faculty pursuits. Unlike many presidents who begin their terms by creating new bureaucratic processes and structures, she did just the opposite, dissolving large sections of a "gridlock" bureaucracy. Academic leaders describe how this improved productivity and morale:

> Before this president came we were running into brick walls. Now we can't climb all the stairs, but we are not losing step because we can't go where we want. I am tired, but it is a good tired. I am able to expect more of others.

Keeton is also known for "setting an example" of hard work and accomplishment. People say that "her work ethic is unbelievable," that she has "vigor" and is "in tune," and that she is "aggressive, assertive" -- in sum, that she is "most adept at doing what she is doing." Finally, she is recognized for cultivating the college's base of support, if not financially (due to unmanageable external constraints) than politically. She is known for recruiting key officials and citizens to be "very helpful in a public relations way ... [and to] speak in support of the college."

Despite these accomplishments she emphasizes how hard it is to lead during "financially chaotic" times:

> I have dealt with some of the most difficult situations that you could ever imagine. ... Ambiguity ... coping with existential anxiety, the uncertainty about what does all of this mean if anything?

And as she describes the leadership that the college needs, she also describes what she, as its presidential leader, needs:

> [To] keep a sense of humor ... [to] keep things in perspective .... being able to see the ridiculous side of our behavior. We take so seriously things that aren't too significant. You have to be able to see the absurd side of our behavior. That is important for mental health and well being. You can't be serious all the time. It helps in my leadership that I can laugh and hug someone ... that I am a caring person and that I can demonstrate that through my behavior, that I am not cold and removed from the faculty's concerns.

Resources and Stress

Defining and Experiencing Financial Stress. During both visits the president and other top administrators report unequivocally that resources are in "continual erosion," and Keeton confesses, "I feel like I am walking right on the edge." The faculty repeat what administrators and faculty leaders tell them (that "the situation is worse"), but they express less anxiety. One faculty member says:

> We almost laugh at it ... the same old thing ... you have to laugh at things you have no control over .... [It] does not make us depressed ... nor do we dwell on it all the time. It's always been some type of restraint as far as resources go.

And a key faculty leader adds:

> I tend not to be interested in financial matters.... My feeling is that we keep crying wolf ... but I always get paid .... I have never missed a paycheck.

In describing their work, nearly all faculty interviewees show hope and purpose ("feeling beleaguered but courageous"), and they see the college as "moving along ... moving forward ... not [staying at] the status quo." One faculty leader sums up the faculty's feelings as "fatalism blended with lifted spirits" and adds, "Things can't get worse so maybe they will get better. We have been down so long. The only way is up."

While the stress I had felt among Arcadia's faculty led me to ask why it was there and what might be causing it, at Industrial College I had to ask why, on the whole, the faculty felt so good. I was drawn to three factors: how the president communicates financial matters, how college members conceive of growth, and how faculty members center their attention on the immediate present.

Communicating about finances. President Keeton meets regularly with the faculty to:

> ... go through the whole budget picture ... develop a picture of the institution's finances -- where the revenues come from, and where the expenses are going ... showing that over several years ....

Academic leaders say that the president's presentations help the faculty "see the implications of budgetary decisions" and "understand what is happening," and that this generates trust by bringing the president's priorities to light:

> The faculty have seen that we have put more money into instruction than ever before, and they know where the money came from .... If in the upcoming year she has to reorganize, the faculty have the sense that she is not making things up or hiding money.

Faculty leaders report that they rely heavily on the president's definition of the college's finances, and this bears out when I hear them repeat phrases that she has also used in answering my interview questions. The faculty also comment on her presentational style. One faculty leader says, "We never get a bunch of numbers that mean nothing," and another adds, "She presents clearly ... does not leave people feeling bewildered." In addition to her formal budgetary meetings with the faculty, Rebecca Keeton is available informally to fill in gaps in people's knowledge, and in these sessions she is just as "open," and "clear" as in the more formal meetings.

While Keeton confronts the "chaos" of financial events, the

faculty confront an equally frightening but more orderly view: They get "the problem as it is defined in her mind." They can also hear what she is doing about it, where she succeeds, and where she is limited. Thus they understand that in many ways, "her hands are tied" and that "given the situation ... there is little a president can do." An academic leader explains how this kind of understanding affects faculty morale:

> Our resources have decreased even though the enthusiasm and morale remain high. The underlying financial factor is seen to be the external factor that we can't get control over -- the problem we are having is not an internal factor. It is not us ....

Besides understanding the limitations, the faculty realize that the college administration "is doing all that it can to support what [the faculty] are all about." A faculty member explains:

> [The president] has our interests at heart ... her heart, time, and efforts are devoted to this college ... we have the feeling that we count .... It is important for us to feel that our interests are being considered and cared for.

Rethinking growth. At Industrial College people are searching for a different vision of growth and productive change, and they say that they want their leadership to help them find it:

> We need a president to encourage us to find new ways of doing what we are already doing while remaining within our current confines .... We need to try to encourage people to expand the college in more subtle ways.

Interviewees see the president as meeting this need in two ways: by seeking external support for what the college is already doing well, and by "focusing on the management of what we do have."

While no one defines this wished-for growth more specifically, there are clues in the interviews about what it might entail. Faculty, for example, refer to "how much we [do] with so little," and an academic administrator says that you have to focus on "how far you can stretch the buck" and "how well utilized [the equipment and buildings] are," and not just how you can maintain them or acquire more. A cabinet-level administrator suggests the importance of "not expecting that you will get what you need just by asking for it," but rather, being "creative" and patient ("an eternal optimist"). He also refers to an ethic of working and thinking closely with others and of arguing openly over point-of-view rather than resources. For example, he says that he calls other members of the president's administrative team several times a day to get alternate views on decisions and problems. And he comments on the absence of animosity over resource allocation: "[The cabinet officers] do argue but we share ... we have a dependence on each other ... we don't have the time to fight over money."

There is little argument in this institution about how resources should be divided up among college divisions, or when and where the college might find more, as concerns about

acquisition turn to concerns about best use.

Centering on the immediate present. Arcadia's president, Joshua Anderson, is naturally inclined to attend to the routine of the present moment while his faculty urge him to think more about the future. The faculty of Industrial College also worry about what the future may bring, but few are concerned that President Keeton should be doing other than what she is. Here most faculty prefer to focus on everyday professional tasks -- teaching classes, meeting students, developing courses -- and the president, in promoting teaching and learning, strongly encourages this.

The view of time at Industrial differs from the view at Arcadia in another way. Given a time frame of past, present, and future, Arcadia's faculty see the present as the high point -- as improved over the past and possibly as better than the uncertain future; at Arcadia the future holds the possibility of negative change. At Industrial, the faculty see continued financial decline: The past was difficult, the present is worse, the future will proceed on the same course; they expect little change in a world that they know well.

Observations and Emerging Propositions

I will conclude with several observations and propositions about resources, resource stress, and leadership at Arcadia College and Industrial College.

On Creating Financial Realities

College finances -- like college logos, ceremonies, and legends -- are an artifact of the cultural and "felt" life of a college. They are essential "props" in the enacted drama of organization. At both Arcadia and Industrial, people often work with, through, or around finances, using them to rationalize what they do, what they don't do, or what they believe they should or should not be doing. They think, talk, argue, and worry about revenues, allocations, expenditures, investments, and costs, often with strong emotion. Or they studiously ignore financial matters, diverting their attention to other aspects of college life. In short, money is one of the building blocks of organizational culture.

If we define the concept of "reality" as the beliefs and understandings to which an individual responds -- physically, intellectually, or emotionally -- then, as the case of Arcadia College suggests, any one organization has the potential to reflect a large assortment of financially defined realities, each spawning diverse reactions among members who differ in their views. Because finances are a subject of human understanding, they are also subject to mixed understanding.

Presidents may respond to multiple financial realities. For example, they may respond instrumentally to their own financial assessments, however derived, by adjusting specific financial components (e.g., cutting costs, raising funds). Or they may "respond" by working on how other organizational members assess their situations, for example, by providing them with a conceptual framework for organizing their thinking about financial matters, by drawing their attention to selected peer-group comparisons, or by pointing out unseen but relevant indicators of organizational performance. The president's primary tool for doing this is simply verbal explanation, and the obvious forum is a faculty meeting for presenting the state of the budget.

On Creating Financial Stress

Among faculty, feelings of financial stress result as much from an absence of understanding as from an absence of money. A president who neglects to develop the faculty's understanding of college resources is likely to engender stress regardless how good the college's financial condition is. At Arcadia the new faculty's inability to understand the president's purposive shunning of "physical growth" in favor of a containment strategy makes him look "laid back," and they worry that his inaction will spell "death" for the college. What is not immediately obvious is that their frame for making sense of how finances work differs from that of the president, but they do not realize this (nor does the president do anything about it). As a result, they continue to interpret the situation in the only way they know how, and which, in this case, makes the college look like it is floundering, rather than, from the president's viewpoint, holding steady.

Money may, in fact, be a source of stress. At Arcadia the existence of a healthy budget gives the cabinet something to fight over, and it gives the president an opportunity to assert that regardless how large the pot, there are always limitations. The situation at Industrial is diametrically opposite: Because there is little money, there is little to fight over, and limitations are a non-issue.

Moreover, at Arcadia, having money today sets up the possibility of loss (defined as negative change) in the future. At Industrial, this kind of major, directional change in resource status is not as likely: Although painful decline is likely to continue, it will be nothing new for them. Thus while faculty at Arcadia are extremely anxious about what resource change could mean for them, Industrial's faculty laugh, virtually ignoring the hardship that is already well embedded in their daily lives.

Feelings of stress emanate from comparisons -- the state of the college to the condition of selected peers, the college as it is today to what it may become in the future, the reality that

people know and live day by day to a vision of what a college ideally should be. Leaders who neglect to participate in setting the faculty's comparative frame risk the faculty's adoption of frames that yield only negative views, or they risk the confusion that comes when mixed frames are in use. This is the major source of stress at Arcadia.

Resource hunting can do as much to distance a president from the faculty as to endear her to them. At Arcadia the president's new-found interest in resource acquisition represents his departure from their everyday lives, and they feel this emotionally. At Industrial the faculty see the president's external work as a binding force: She reduces the college's marginal status in its region, re-engaging it, with elevated status, in its larger community.

On Reducing Financial Stress

While confusion over the financial state may heighten the faculty's feelings of stress, understanding may help reduce them. Industrial's president, a good model of "administrator as teacher," takes great pains to assemble a systematic and understandable financial lesson for her faculty. Because she can do little to resolve the real financial problem (declining revenues), she works at reducing the ambiguity that surrounds it, clarifying the constraints on the college, and in doing so, she lays out the possibilities for tolerating or surmounting them. While the landscape that she paints for the faculty is full of obstacles, these can at least be seen and understood. At Arcadia, the faculty create their own picture -- including images of obstacles -- at times fully disassembling the president's original design.

Attention to what the college is and has "here and now" may displace concerns about what it lacks relative to its peers or what it may lose in the future. The opposite may also be true: Comparing self to others and focusing extensively on the future may detract from the experience of the present moment. At Arcadia the faculty give so much attention to their "biggest competitors" and to concerns about the future that it is hard to see any real "present-tense" issues. At Industrial the most prominent comparison is the college to itself -- its past to its present, its progress despite great odds ("how much we have done with so little"), the realization that things have gotten better incrementally despite the odds ("we've never had it so good"). The focus is on "the management of what we do have" -- the concern of the moment -- and preserving its inherent "quality."

While centering on the "here and now" is helpful, escaping it, if only for a moment, can provide essential relief and "perspective." This is what the faculty at Industrial College are, in effect, doing as they "de-construct" the reality of

finances just long enough to laugh at it ("the same old thing"), and when the president stops momentarily to glimpse "the ridiculous .... the absurd side of our behavior" or to "laugh and hug someone."

Clarifying and amplifying the personal meaning of the faculty's professional work, showing authentic appreciation for it, and extending support (in whatever form) for their continued efforts can moderate the effects of financial hardship. Morale at Industrial College is tied directly to the faculty's belief that their teaching is central to the college, and that the president believes and fully supports this. Although it is irritating (there are "grumblings"), the financial situation fails to diminish the feeling.

On Merging Complexity and Commitment

Presidential effectiveness requires a good match between the organization's resource complexity, including its instrumental and symbolic dimensions (Pfeffer 1981), and the president's cognitive complexity (see Ashby 1956 and Birnbaum 1988). However, as a quality of mind (see Bartunek, Gordon, and Weathersby 1983), complexity may be construed in many different ways. While previous studies of the Institutional Leadership Project have referred to cognitive complexity as the spanning of multiple cognitive frames (Bensimon 1989b, 1990b), leadership theories (Birnbaum 1988), strategies (Neumann 1989b), orientations (Neumann 1989a, Neumann and Bensimon, 1990), and roles (Neumann, in press), the cases of Arcadia and Industrial suggest a need for a definition that exceeds specific models, lenses, and theories: Cognitive complexity might be defined as the ability to think in expansive (even contradictory) terms and directions about the complexities and contradictions of everyday organizational life -- for example, viewing quality as a foundation for resource development rather than linearly as its outcome, or understanding that when resources are tight, spending money may be more productive than putting it away. Even the use of humor, defined as a momentary reframing or "de-construction" of conventional interpretation, requires this kind of complexity of mind. Viewed this way, cognitive complexity reflects what Cameron (1984) calls Janusian thinking, what Chaffee (1984) refers to as the ability to consider simultaneous opposites, and what Birnbaum (1988) describes as counter-intuitive "thinking in circles."

Complexity does not always come naturally or easily. As in the case of Arcadia's president, it often requires studied cultivation and disciplined exercise, especially when there is no pressing external need for it. At Industrial, the president's complexity is devoted to responding to pressures that others -- mostly outsiders -- bring ready-made to her attention. At Arcadia the president's complexity is devoted to selecting or

creating the objects to which he will attend, a task requiring different, perhaps more complicated energy.

While cognitive complexity is attractive in its reach beyond the conventional and rational, its expansiveness also raises the question of limits: Where are the personal boundaries that separate the things that a person will consider enacting, from those she would deem unacceptable? Where and when does the complex of possible considerations stop, and what causes this? While the presidents of Arcadia and Industrial strive for cognitive expansiveness, there are certain considerations that neither will tolerate, given several essential commitments (e.g., concern for people over funding and administration). In both cases, the points where purposeful expansiveness ends and delimited commitment begins are marked by personal values. What seems to make the expansiveness and contradiction that accompany cognitive complexity tolerable for these presidents is that they are bounded by their personal values.

It is probably significant that Joshua Anderson's disengagement from Arcadia College in 1988-9 was accompanied by a loosening of his value-bound commitments: For the first time in his tenure, he distanced himself physically, intellectually, and emotionally from the daily rhythm of campus life. He lost touch with his original commitment to resource use as his interests turned to resource acquisition. More importantly, he lost touch with people as his attention turned to dollars. In other words, through his actions, he communicated blatant contradiction of the values that he himself had embedded in the college's culture. In doing so, he threatened the culture as the reality that people know. He also threatened his continuance within it.

While in both cases, the faculty recognize and appreciate their president's complexity, they are particularly strong in praising her or his commitments and purposeful delimitations.

On Communicating and Learning

The faculty are likely to interpret presidential action through the frame of their own understanding, including their beliefs about what the action would mean if they themselves were carrying it out. Virtually every public action that a president takes (including actions that she refrains from taking) is an act of communication, even though it may be read differently by different people. The presidency is more a sign (Schutz 1967) designating meaning than an instrument designating accomplishment. At least one previous study concludes that the primary task of new college presidents is to shape this sign so that it may be read and understood (Bensimon 1990a).

Communication between leaders and followers may be uni-directional in the model of dissemination, or it may be interactive in the model of dialogue. An example of interactive

communication is the president speaking, then listening for how faculty make sense of her words and for what they already know about what she says, then reshaping her approach based on what she learned about what is already in their minds. Because interactive communication is more tailored to current understanding, it would also seem to lead more effectively to learning-related change -- although slowly and painstakingly.

Interactive communication requires more energy than uni-directional communication, and it is more difficult to sustain over time. At Industrial, a new president struggles to clarify to the faculty the financial state of the college and what she is doing about it (e.g., through carefully planned presentations). She also struggles to help the faculty make their understanding of finances known to her (e.g., by being open to casual conversation) so that she can reframe her "teaching" in line with their needs as she sees them.

Arcadia's long-term president does not struggle in the same way to grasp and shape the faculty's understanding of the financial foundation of their organizational world (although he may have done so early in his term). Had there been no change in the composition of Arcadia's faculty, it is not clear that this would matter. But the entrance of a critical mass of new faculty with different views of how colleges and finances work creates friction: During 1988-9 the new faculty are struggling to make their views of what growth and stasis mean understandable to the administration, but administrators do not hear them -- nor is it clear that the new faculty actively try to understand the administration's stance.

The absence of interactive communication at Arcadia raises questions about what long-term presidents can do to reenact, as needed, the kind of communication they would most likely have used in their early years in office -- when they were making their first connections with the faculty. While this reenactment may not be necessary when the faculty is stable ("tenured in" over many years), it may be essential when large numbers of senior faculty leave and new faculty cohorts enter. At such times, "old presidents" may have to reassume the "new president" role, engaging in the communicative tasks of "getting to know" the new faculty and simultaneously "becoming known" by them (Bensimon 1987) that they assumed on first entering office.

Conclusion: On Resources, Resource Talk, and Stress

What do the analysis and cases reveal about the difference between financial "hard times" and "good times" and their leadership?

By 1988-9 the key differences between the leadership of

Arcadia and Industrial were these: At Industrial College, a new president was devoted to resolving the faculty's confusions and apprehensions over the college's financial state, and to clarifying, by word and deed, the relationship between administrative action and core educational values. These measures bolstered the faculty's morale and lessened feelings of stress despite the college's real financial troubles. At Arcadia College, the president, a veteran in office and assured of the college's financial solidity but suddenly seeking opportunities for expansion, neglected to explain the logic of his new strategy which, to the faculty (old and new), reflected mixed meaning. Many of the faculty were critical and felt financially stressed despite the college's good resource base.

These summary differences show that the faculty may feel financial stress regardless of a college's more "objective" financial state, and that leaders may moderate this stress by crafting their communication, including their non-verbal communicative acts, with care. What this suggests is that although the faculty express their stress as being about resources (and although they talk of it in terms of resources), that this explanation is incomplete. Rather, it seems that their "resource talk" is a vehicle (perhaps the only one available to them) for expressing an even deeper stress -- and one that is wordless -- over absent understanding or broken meaning.

The study also suggests that a college's financial resources are not fully separate from a college's cultural being -- that "resources" are part of the organizational stuff through which culture is enacted.

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